

Route Summary

An easy access trail which takes in the wonderful scenery around Gisburn Forest & Stocks Reservoir. Keep an eye out for cyclists in some parts of the forest and take care on road sections. Walkers are advised to carry OS Explorer map OL41.

Route Overview



Category: Walking

Rating: Unrated

Surface: Moderate

Date Published: 11th January 2018

Difficulty: Easy

Length: 7.790 km / 4.87 mi

Last Modified: 6th February 2018

Description

Gisburn Forest, Stocks reservoir and much of the surrounding farmland is owned by United Utilities as a water catchment area. The forest is managed by the Forestry Commission for timber sales, conservation and recreation. The forest and reservoir are rich in both birdlife and local history, playing host to a "lost village". The village of Stocks in Bowland was first recorded in 1242 and continued until the early 1930s when the valley was flooded to create the reservoir. Only the church, school and vicarage remained above the water (now all demolished). The foundations of St. James' Church, which stood on the site of Stocks Reservoir car park, have been excavated as part of a community archaeology project. A new church was built in 1938 on the eastern side of the reservoir. Imagine this former village of cottages, smithy, inn, post office, church and school serving the wider rural and farming community - a blueprint for countryside life which still holds strong today.

A shorter, 1.5 mile circular section of the route can be started from Stocks Reservoir car park on School Lane. In which case, the route description should be followed from Point 6.

Waypoints

1 1.

(53.99729; -2.39077)

Leave the car park at Gisburn Forest Hub and turn right to follow the access track towards the road.

2 2.

(53.99444; -2.39268)

Take the next track on the right, past a green barrier and then pass a barn on the left. Continue along the track to a junction of paths, turn left and continue along the path. The path bears right and continues parallel to the road.

3 3.

(53.99376; -2.40154)

Where the track goes right along a blue cycle route bear left and follow the pink sign to 'Stocks Reservoir'. Emerge on the road before Dale Head Church.

4 4.

(53.99360; -2.40211)

Turn right (take care on the bend) and continue for a 1/3rd mile, passing Dale Head Church on the way, then take a left next to a gate to follow a concessionary route through the woodland (continue to follow the pink 'Stocks Reservoir' arrows).

5 5.

(53.99966; -2.40219)

Take care as you emerge onto the road and turn left along the causeway. At the end of the causeway take the first path on the left - through woodland parallel to the road – and continue all the way to Stocks Reservoir car park.

6 6.

(54.00411; -2.41045)

In the car park you can see the remains of the original St. James Church, which was part of the village of Stocks-in-Bowland in the parish of Dale Head. 500 people were living in the parish when it was established in 1872. The village and church were demolished during the construction of the reservoir in the early part of the 20th century. The information panels in the car park give more details about the work to uncover the church footprint.

Leave the car park via the gap next to the field gate in the corner near the pay and display machine and follow the path ahead (known as Miry Lane). After a short distance you will come to a gap in the wall on your left. This is the entrance to the picnic area.

7 7.

(54.00480; -2.41163)

The picnic area, which was once the site of the village vicarage, is a great place to stop and look out over the reservoir. Stocks Reservoir was built by the Fylde Water Board and is now owned and managed by United Utilities. The main construction began in 1922 and took 10 years to complete.

Continue a little further along the track until another path joins from the left.

8 8.

(54.00510; -2.41219)

The path on the left will take you to the first of two bird hides which are open to the public. Stocks Reservoir is important for wildfowl and is amongst the best sites in north west England. Up to 30 species of wildfowl can visit the reservoir during the winter.

To continue with the Birch Hills Trail carry on along the main path. To your left, beyond the trees, the views now begin to open up to the high points of Saddle Hill, Bloe Greet and Catlow Fell. The open areas along the path are good places to spot woodland birds like thrushes, finches, woodpeckers and long-tailed tits.

Two farmhouses, Croft House and Higher Croft House, once stood nearby - part of the earlier, thriving community of Stocks-in-Bowland.

9 9.

(54.01066; -2.41514)

At the waymarker turn right into the woodland.

The forestry adjacent to the reservoir is managed by the Forestry Commission, with much of the original planting having taken place in the 1940s. The coniferous trees are grown for timber, whilst the creation of new native woodland provides a range of important wildlife habitats. The forest has also become a popular recreation destination.

Follow the path which leads upwards through the woodland until you come to a seat at a bend in the track.

10 10.

(54.01154; -2.41292)

This is the site of another farmhouse, which was known as Higher Birch Hill. Records show that a family called Miller lived here until 1920. Unfortunately, no photographs of the farm have come to light yet but the overgrown ruins are visible and a gatepost is still standing to the left of the track.

Continue upwards along the path until you reach the junction with a forestry track.

11 11.

(54.01155; -2.41116)

Turn right onto the forestry track and continue to follow it as it as it bends and narrows and passes through closely planted conifers, until you come to a bench in a small clearing.

12 12.

(54.00852; -2.40859)

This clearing is a good spot to stop and take in the sights and sounds of the forest. In the middle of the clearing there is an old, twisted oak tree. Clearings like this allow more light in and add to the variety of habitats.

Continue along the forest path as it gradually swings to the right and starts to go gently downhill, crossing two small streams along the way. The route eventually opens out and reaches another bench.

13 13.

(54.00649; -2.40754)

The bench here overlooks a clough of mature broadleaved trees where Swinshaw (or Swinshea) farmhouse once stood. Swinshaw had a large cartshed where traders would drop off items for local people to collect and where schoolchildren often ate their lunch. The date stone and part of the decorative scroll are now built into the wall behind the excavated church in Stocks Reservoir car park.

Continue along the path with its surface of pine needles and tree roots, descending through an avenue of tall trees and eventually over a bridge, until you re-join the path from the car park. Turn left here and re-trace your route back to Gisburn Forest Hub.

